

Recreation Opportunities Analysis



MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION



5. MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION

BACKGROUND

LANDSCAPE SETTING

The Mississippi River Corridor Region is located on the western edge of the state and stretches north to south across St. Croix, Dunn, Pierce, Pepin, Buffalo, Trempealeau, La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford and Grant counties. Running along the region's western border, the Lower St. Croix River and Mississippi River are key recreational resources in the region. The riverway and its backwaters are used for a variety of water-based recreational activities such as migratory bird hunting, boating and swimming. Streams feeding into the Mississippi support an excellent cold-water trout fishery. Although most public lands within the region are fishery or wildlife areas, there are also several state parks. The Great River Road, a thoroughfare that follows the Mississippi for 250 miles, connects over 50 local parks and beaches. Urban influences in St. Croix and Pierce counties also impact the region as visitors from and commuters to the nearby Twin Cities Metro Area make use of the region's recreational resources. Suburban development associated with this continues to impact recreation supply and demand.

The landscape at the northern end is a mixture of rolling hills and steeply unglaciated areas. Being just south of the "tension zone", this western prairie area is characterized by generally open, gently to moderately rolling hills with pothole lakes, ponds, wet depressions, and some of the best prairie pot holes in the state. A ribbon of forest occurs along the St. Croix River, with soils consisting of a mosaic of silty, shallow and stony alluvial sands and peats.

Moving southward, the landscape transitions to hill and valley areas that have little glacial influence; they are comprised of expansive oak forest, large undeveloped rivers with flood plain forests, cold water streams and springs, hillside prairies, oak savanna, caves, pine and hemlock relicts, and the Mississippi River Valley and blufflands. Soils are typically silt loam and sandy loams in the uplands and alluvial or terrace deposits in the valley floors. At the same time, these areas are characterized by highly eroded, unglaciated topography. Steep-sided valleys are heavily forested and often managed for hardwood production. Large, meandering rivers with broad floodplains include the Mississippi, Wisconsin, La Crosse and Kickapoo rivers. The floodplain forests associated with these riverine systems are among the largest in the Upper Midwest. Spring fed, cold-water streams that support robust brown and brook trout fisheries are also common throughout the area.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Moving north to south, land use across the Mississippi River Corridor Region transitions from largely agricultural to primarily forested – and shifts again in the south towards a primarily agricultural land use. Overall, the major land use in the Mississippi River Corridor Region is still agricultural, followed closely by forest. Agricultural activities, primarily dairy and beef farming, are typically confined to valley floors and ridge tops.

Although dairy farming and row crops remain the predominant agricultural uses, this area is experiencing rapid urbanization along its western fringe due to its proximity to the Twin Cities. Top employment sectors of the regional economy include education and health services, trade transportation and utilities, professional and business services, government, leisure and hospitality, and manufacturing.

RECREATION USE AND PARTICIPATION

Given its proximity to the Twin Cities Metro Area, the Mississippi River Corridor receives steady pressure for outdoor recreation. The Mississippi River and its associated backwaters are used for a variety of activities including hunting, trapping, fishing and boating. Recreation demand from both local and out-of-town visitors is focused upon sightseeing and bird watching, while the river also provides opportunities for water based recreation such as motor boating and swimming. Boating and fishing are very popular on the St. Croix River. Several cold-water streams in the area are long-standing fishing destinations throughout the region, including the Kinnickinnic, Rush, Timber Coulee, West Fork of the Kickapoo and Big Green Rivers.

The topography and mix of forest and agricultural land make this area well suited for hunting of many types. Deer hunting is especially popular and game populations are high enough to supply plenty of opportunities. Since the huge success of wild turkey reintroduction beginning in Vernon County back in the 1970's, this region has been a hotbed for spring turkey hunting. The river is a migratory bird flyway which attracts waterfowl hunters during the fall migration as countless birds make their way south.

State parks within this landscape receive substantial use for a variety of activities, including camping, hiking, and nature observation. Willow River State Park, having the third-highest visitation rate in the state, is a popular destination for those from the Twin Cities Metro Area. Perrot State Park is very popular during the spring migration as trumpeter swans rest in the backwaters of the Mississippi River. Within the unglaciated and rugged topography to the South, there is considerable demand for more hiking, off road biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and camping opportunities. Demand for trails has spurred local groups to coalesce and subsequently develop plans for community and county-wide trail networks. "Water trails" are becoming especially popular in this region. Many of the waterways are very scenic and tend to be conducive for canoeing, kayaking and "tubing". The Lower Wisconsin, Chippewa, La Crosse, Black, Apple and Kickapoo Rivers are all popular water trail destinations.

Recreation participation rates for Wisconsin residents as a whole were presented on page 14 of the Introduction. The majority of participation rates of Mississippi River Corridor Region residents are consistent with the state average or within five percentage points in variation. The differences to the state average are shown in the box to the right.

Activities that residents of the Mississippi River Corridor Region participate in at higher rates than the state average:

- Fishing – from a boat, canoe or kayak
- Harvesting berries/mushrooms, etc.
- Hunting – big game

EXISTING RECREATION SUPPLY IN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION

PUBLIC LANDS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

The Mississippi River Corridor Region has approximately 240,000 acres of public land available for outdoor recreation. The area has a variety of opportunities available along the Mississippi River and its tributaries that meander through the region. This section briefly describes the public conservation and recreation lands in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. A description of all public lands in Wisconsin is provided in Appendix 3.

a) Federal

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manages almost 99,000 acres in most counties along the Mississippi River. These properties function as areas for prairie habitat restoration, wildlife refuges and waterfowl production.

The National Park Service owns and manages over 800 acres in St. Croix county where the southern-most stretch of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is located. This national water trail stretches north and east on the Namekagon and St. Croix Rivers, beginning in Cable.

b) State

The Department of Natural Resources owns over 133,000 acres in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. State properties in the region span the range of intended recreational settings and development levels (Map B3). At one end of the spectrum are properties such as Willow River, Perrot and Wyalusing State Parks that include developed campgrounds, miles of trails, boating opportunities and picnic sites. Willow River State Park, with views of Willow Falls and the river valley, sees over 900,000 visitors each year. At the other end of the spectrum are properties like Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area, which features the largest concentration of remaining prairies and savanna in the state and was specifically acquired to protect these critical habitats and natural communities. Although these types of properties can provide some limited

recreation opportunities for low-impact activities such as hunting, bird watching and nature study, their primary purpose is not necessarily to provide recreation opportunities requiring development or infrastructure.

The Kickapoo Reserve Board manages the 7,200-acre Kickapoo Valley Reserve in Vernon County on behalf of the state and Ho-Chunk Nation. The Reserve offers a variety of recreation opportunities, including trails for equestrian, biking, hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, as well as access to camping, canoeing, fishing and hunting.

c) County

All of the county forests lands in the Mississippi River Corridor are within Vernon County. Over 1,800 acres of county forest provide reasonable opportunity to explore the region's rugged topography.

Beyond county forests, many of the region's counties manage parks that provide campgrounds, boat launches, and other types of infrastructure to support recreation.

d) Other

Many cities, villages, and townships in the Mississippi River Corridor Region own and manage parks, boat access sites, and other properties that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. Given their easy proximity to many citizens and scenic views, these properties are very well-used. In addition, several school forests in the region are open to some forms of recreation, generally when they are not in use by school and community groups.

PRIVATE LANDS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

This section summarizes the privately-owned lands in the region that are open to the public for some types of recreation. A detailed description of private lands in Wisconsin open to the public is provided in Appendix 3.

a) Managed Forest Law (MFL) and Forest Crop Law enrolled lands

The amount of land enrolled in these forestry programs is spread across the counties in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. Over 28,000 acres in the region are currently enrolled in these programs. Because these programs use 25 or 50-year contracts, the total amount enrolled changes from year to year as landowners enroll lands into the program (only the MFL program is open to enrollment) and contracts covering other lands expire. MFL-closed land is not open for public use.

b) Land trusts

The following land trusts operate in the Mississippi River Corridor Region: Mississippi Valley Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, The Prairie Enthusiasts, West Wisconsin Land Trust, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, and Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust. These non-profit conservation organizations have protected over 9,500 acres in the region. Most of these lands are open to the public for some forms of recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, and other similar activities.

c) Voluntary Public Access Program

The DNR Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program provides financial incentives to private landowners who open their property to public hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation. Funding was authorized in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills. Funds from 2014 are administered and provided by U.S. Department of Agriculture-NRCS. To date, there are over 10,000 acres available in the Mississippi River Corridor Region.

d) Snowmobile Trails on Private Lands

The state snowmobile trail network has been developed through the work of local clubs partnering with private landowners. Agreements with willing landowners allow trails to be located for the winter season,

which enables snowmobilers to travel throughout the network. There are 2,186 miles of snowmobile trail in the Lower Lake Michigan Coastal, of which 95% (2,082 miles) on are private lands.

EXISTING PUBLIC RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The department contacted representatives from county governments and regional organizations to gather information about the recreation opportunities available to the public across the Mississippi River Corridor Region. In addition, department staff searched websites for additional data and descriptions of the recreation opportunities provided. Maps C and D show existing recreation infrastructure in the ten counties of the region.

The Mississippi River Corridor contains a number of many large public land holdings, notably seven state parks, several state fish and wildlife management properties, and five federal properties. These properties provide a wide range of high-quality recreation opportunities. What follows are a few examples of infrastructure in the Mississippi River Corridor Region that support a variety of recreation activities.

a) Perrot State Park:

- 12+ miles of hiking trails
- 100+ family campsites
- Bluffs and scenic view of the Mississippi River Valley
- Nature center and picnic areas
- Groomed cross-country ski trails
- Boat landing on the Trempealeau River
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities

b) Willow River State Park

- 13 miles of hiking trails
- Trails for snowshoeing and dog sledding
- 9 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails
- 150 family campsites
- Playground, swimming beach and picnic areas
- Non-motorized boating, canoeing and kayaking
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities

c) Wildcat Mountain State Park

- Over 20 miles of hiking trails
- 15 miles for horseback riding, horse campground
- 45 campsites plus group camping areas
- Canoe landing access to the Kickapoo River
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Cross-county skiing and snowshoeing opportunities

d) Wyalusing State Park

- 14 miles of hiking trails
- Playground and picnic areas
- 100+ family campsites
- Boating and canoe/kayak opportunities
- Hiking, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities

e) Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

- Segment of Great River State Trail
- Over 8 miles of cross-country ski trails
- Interpretation centers and kiosks
- Exceptional bird watching opportunities
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, picnic areas and wildlife watching opportunities

f) Kickapoo Valley Reserve

- Hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing opportunities
- 37 miles equestrian, 24 miles mountain bike and 8 miles fat tire bike trails
- Hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities
- 25 primitive camping sites
- Several landings with access to the Kickapoo River

g) State Wildlife, Fishery and Natural Areas

- Hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities
- Hiking, nature study, photography, wildlife watching opportunities

h) State Trails and National Water Trail

- Over 26 miles of the Chippewa River and Red Cedar State Trails for hiking, biking and snowmobiling
- Over 40 miles of the Great River and La Crosse River State Trails for hiking, biking and snowmobiling
- A portion of the 200-mile St. Croix National Scenic Riverway water trail

PUBLIC INPUT ON RECREATION NEEDS IN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION

INPUT GATHERED AS PART OF THE ROA.

The department hosted four public open house meetings, in Eau Claire, Stevens Point, Onalaska and Appleton between October 23 and November 1, 2017. These open houses were designed to both present information about the ROA and to gather public input on the types of recreation activities they pursued, what places they liked to visit (including what attributes drew them to these properties), and what additional opportunities they wished were available in the Mississippi River Corridor Region.

In addition to these open houses, the department posted an online public input form to its web page. A downloadable version was also available for people who preferred to print, fill out, and send in the form. The public input period ran from October 6 to November 17, 2017. The department sent out information and press releases about the ROA project and encouraged people to share their perspectives through the online or hardcopy public input forms. Recreation groups, non-profit organizations, and others distributed links to the input form to their members.¹

The department received comments in the following formats:

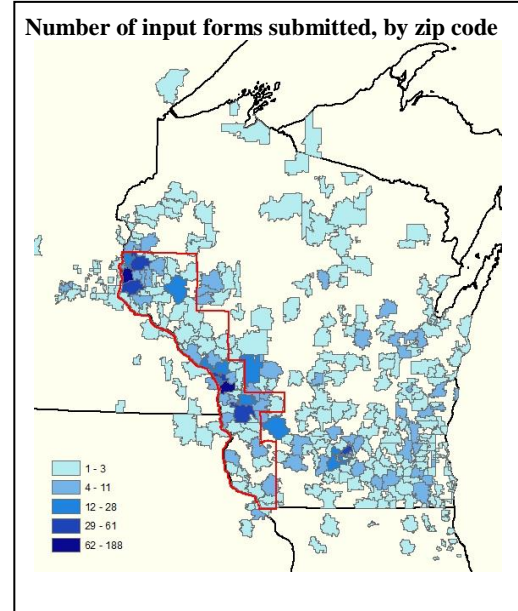
- 1,628 online public input forms
- 93 paper copies of the public input form
- 6 letters and emails

It is important for readers to keep in mind that the public input received through the ROA process is simply information gathered at one point in time, using an open-access technique. It is not a representation of what the “average” resident believes or the range of perspectives that exist.

¹ The public input form was available for anyone to complete and over 1,700 people did so. The department’s experience is that when it provides “open access” opportunities in which anyone can participate, the people that respond tend to be those that find out about the input opportunity and to have a particular or active interest in a specific issue; that is, they care enough about an issue to take the time to find and fill out the form or write an email or letter. The responses received are valuable in providing the department with an understanding of people’s perspectives, reasoning and breadth of viewpoints. However, because there is no “defined population” from which these responses originate, from a statistical perspective there is no way to know how the respondents compare to a larger population (for example, how the 1,700+ respondents compare to the population of the ten-county region or the state as a whole) and therefore no way that the results can be generalized with an associated error margin to a larger population.

Respondents were asked to list the zip code of their primary residence. Of those who provided this information, the map on the right shows their distribution and frequency. As can be seen, the primary residence of many people who provided input is within the nine-county Mississippi River Corridor Region. The top three counties identified as primary residence was La Crosse (20%), St. Croix (14%) and Dane (13%) counties. Of those respondents from La Crosse County, 85% identified themselves as hikers. Similar percentages were in St. Croix and Dane counties.

The Mississippi River Valley with its scenic views has attracted outdoor enthusiasts for generations. Just one example is Grandad Bluff above the City of La Crosse which has spectacular views of La Crosse, the Mississippi River valley and miles of countryside from its overlook area. From hunting to kayaking, the region offers activities for a wide range of visitors. The department received comments, perspectives and ideas on the following topics.



Participation in outdoor recreation

Respondents to the public input form participate in many outdoor recreation activities. Popular activities that were selected by respondents are seen in the table at right. We can compare these results to the participation results from the recent Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) survey. The **bolded** activities in the table at right were the most popular activities that the SCORP survey indicated residents in the Mississippi River Corridor Region participate in. The activities that respondents to the ROA input form participate in vary from the results of the random sample of Mississippi River Corridor Region residents generated by the SCORP survey.

Properties that people visit

A small percentage of the Mississippi River Corridor Region is in public ownership, totaling over 240,000 acres. With a few exceptions, much of public lands are generally less than 2000-acre blocks. The most popular properties among people who provided input are Wildcat Mountain, Perrot, Wyalusing, and Willow River State Parks as well as the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The La Crosse River and Great River State Trails are popular destinations as well. Local parks, including those in La Crosse County and St. Croix County, were noted as popular places to recreate. The federal properties including the St. Croix National Scenic Reserve, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, and the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge are also frequently visited among those who participated in this public input opportunity.

Popular recreation activities in which respondents to the ROA input form participate

Bicycling – paved trails
 Bicycling – mountain biking, single track
 Bicycling – winter/fat tire
 Camping – tent
 Canoeing/kayaking
 Cross-country skiing/ snowshoeing
Fishing – from a boat, canoe or kayak
Fishing – from shore
Harvesting berries, mushrooms, etc.
Hiking, walking, running on trails
 Swimming
 Wildlife/bird watching

Factors important in determining favorite places to visit

Of the people providing input, the majority (67%) selected (1) the quality of trails as one of the top four most important factors in determining their favorite property to visit. This is expected, given that many respondents noted their participation in a variety of motorized and non-motorized trail activities. In decreasing order, the next three most important factors are: (2) the desire to be in a quiet place, (3) good maps, signs or information about the property, and (4) the quality of the habitat.

Additional outdoor recreation opportunities needed

About 77% of respondents believe that more recreational opportunities are needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. Of the additional opportunities desired by respondents, the top three choices selected were for non-motorized trail-related uses. For those who participated in this public input opportunity, trails for motorized recreation is less of a need than regions to the north. The opportunity that was most frequently selected as needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region was more trails for hiking, walking or running, which was selected by nearly half of respondents.

The recent SCORP survey of statewide residents found a correlation between the activities that people pursue and their perspectives on what additional opportunities are needed in their home county. For many activities, participants generally believed there was a need for more opportunities.

The public input received as part of the ROA showed a similar pattern in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. For example, 78% of those who identified themselves as horseback riders thought there was a need for more horse trails. Also, 70% of those who ride single track mountain bikes believe there is a need for more mountain biking trails in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. Lastly, two-thirds of people who identified themselves as ATV/UTV riders thought that there was need for more motorized recreation trails.

Interestingly, over 55% of those identifying themselves as canoe/kayakers desired more hiking, walking, running trails while only 25% desired more public shore access to lakes and streams. A similar pattern occurs with respondents who fish from watercraft or shore, about half identifying a need for more hiking, walking, running trails as opposed to more public access to lakes and streams.

Department-managed roads and motorized access

About 130 miles of roads exist on department properties in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. These roads are used primarily for management purposes, including primitive seasonal logging roads, natural resource management or other property service activities. Over one-third (48 miles) of these roads are part of the property transportation network and open to the public at least part of the year to drive “street-legal vehicles” (this includes cars, pick-up trucks, SUVs, motorcycles, and other licensed vehicles). By state law, these roads are also open to horses, horse-drawn vehicles and bicycles.

The department sought public feedback on potentially opening none, some, or all department roads that are currently open to “street-legal” vehicles in the Mississippi River Corridor Region to motorized recreation vehicles.² About 47% of people that provided responses believed that all DNR roads should remain closed to motorized recreational vehicles. Of the 43% that supported allowing motorized recreational vehicles on DNR roads, most thought that this access should be on a subset of roads that connect larger regional motorized recreation networks. In addition, 34% of these respondents supporting opening roads thought opening should occur to provide access during the fall hunting season (Sept 1 to Dec 31). Among those identifying themselves as big game hunters, 32% thought all roads

Top 10 most frequently identified recreation opportunities needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region, based on public input gathered during the ROA process

Activity	# of responses
More hiking/walking/running trails	764
More natural surface (dirt) bicycling trails	558
More paved bicycling trails	446
More rustic/quiet campgrounds (pit toilets, no electricity or generators)	409
More public shore access to lakes & streams	296
More local parks and playgrounds	230
More horseback trails	200
More wildlife watching decks or platforms	197
More developed campgrounds (electric hook-ups, flush toilets, showers)	186
More trails for motorized recreation (ATVs, UTVs, off-road motorcycles, etc.)	176

² For purposes of the ROA, “recreational vehicles” includes off highway vehicles, ATVs, UTVs and off highway motorcycles.

should remain closed. Most of hunters who favored opening some roads to motorized use preferred that it connect to a regional motorized trail network while half preferred motorized use during the fall hunting seasons.

INPUT GATHERED AS PART OF THE WISCONSIN SCORP.

In 2016 as part of the development of the SCORP, the department asked a random sample of Wisconsin residents to identify additional outdoor recreation opportunities needed in their home county. The most frequently identified needs statewide were:

- hiking/walking/running trails
- bicycling trails
- public shore access to lakes, rivers and streams
- public shooting ranges
- public campsites
- local parks and playgrounds

Respondents living in the ten counties in the Mississippi River Corridor Region identified the following activities, among others, at a higher rate than the state average:

- equestrian trails
- trails for motorized recreation

Mississippi River Corridor residents identified the following activities, among others, less frequently than the state average:

- local parks and playgrounds
- public campsites

FUTURE RECREATION NEEDS IN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION

The Mississippi River Corridor Region is in a unique setting that lends itself well to various types of outdoor recreation. The many rivers draining to the Mississippi draw trout fisherman from throughout the Midwest. These same rivers also attract a growing sector of paddlers to the area while the hills and valleys are attractive to mountain bikers. The fertile soils and topography support excellent habitat for all sorts of game species, especially deer and turkey. The bluffs along the Mississippi River provide spectacular scenery as well as habitat for rare species and natural communities. These, plus the Mississippi River have the potential to provide abundant recreation opportunities for local citizens and visitors looking for adventure. Communities are already realizing how these natural resource assets could play a growing role in their local economy. These communities are partnering with local citizen groups, raising funds and developing parks, trails and accesses to waterways, attracting visitors year-round. The growth of activity-based clubs or groups also demonstrates a desire for recreationists to organize for the purpose of finding new places to develop and maintain those recreation resources.

The department used the following sources to identify which recreation opportunities are most needed in the region:

- Public input on recreation needs submitted during the comment period (October 6 to November 17, 2017).
- Data on recreation participation and needs gathered in a 2016 survey as part of the development of the 2017-2022 SCORP.
- Data gathered in previous SCORP planning efforts.

From this information, department staff grouped the relative needs for recreation activities as high, medium or low.

The groupings are as follows:

Future recreation needs in the Mississippi River Corridor Region – High	Future recreation needs in the Mississippi River Corridor Region – Medium	Future recreation needs in the Mississippi River Corridor Region – Low
Bicycling - bicycle touring/road riding Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking Bird or wildlife watching Camping - developed Camping - primitive Canoeing or kayaking Cross country skiing Dog walking Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe or kayak Fishing - river fishing from a boat, canoe or kayak Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading Gather mushrooms, berries, etc. Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking Hunting - big game Nature photography Participating in nature-based education programs Picnicking Snowshoeing Visiting a beach, beach walking	ATV/UTV riding Bicycling - fat tire/snow biking Fishing - lake fishing from shore or a pier Fishing - ice fishing Four-wheel vehicle driving Horseback riding Horse cart driving Hunting - migratory birds Hunting - small game Hunting - turkey Motorboating (waterski/tubing, personal watercraft) Swimming in lakes and rivers Target shooting - archery Target shooting - firearms Trapping	Dog sledding/skijoring Dog training Dog trialing Geocaching Off-highway motorcycle riding Rock climbing Sailing, windsurfing, rowing, stand-up paddling Snowmobiling Scuba diving/snorkeling Whitewater rafting

OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET FUTURE RECREATION NEEDS IN THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION ON DEPARTMENT-MANAGED LANDS

On behalf of Wisconsin residents, the department owns and manages properties in the Mississippi River Corridor Region to meet a variety of ecological and recreation goals. These properties are typically influenced by the riverine nature of the region. Even so, there are a variety of types of properties that provide a range of settings and experiences.

Applying the regional needs listed above, the department evaluated the properties it manages in the Mississippi River Corridor Region to identify places where it could potentially incorporate some activities or enhance existing opportunities to meet these needs. The identification of department-managed lands that appear to be “good fits” to provide different activities will be used to help focus the department’s work developing and updating property master plans. A description of opportunities to meet recreation needs in the Mississippi River Corridor Region (on department-managed lands) follows.

NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL RECREATION

Non-motorized trail recreation has been and continues to be a primary outdoor activity throughout the year in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. From hiking and biking the state trails in the summer to cross country skiing at the state parks in the winter, the region's residents and visitors take advantage of the numerous opportunities that currently exist.

The La Crosse area has been a mountain biking magnet for years. More recently, the rolling hills of Pierce and St. Croix counties have experienced high demand for establishing more of these narrow "single-track" trails. As opposed to recreational bicycle touring, where there are benefits to creating multiple connecting linkages, meeting the growing need for mountain biking and off-road biking opportunities can be created or expanded at multiple, stand-alone sites throughout the region. The steep topography and bluffs of this region provide excellent challenge for expert riders while opportunity for beginners is abundant.

Hiking, walking, and running on trails in the region remains very popular activities. Many opportunities currently exist on department properties throughout the region. Additional trails near population centers are likely to be most frequently used.

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for non-motorized trail activities

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Bicycling - bicycle touring/ road riding	Kinnickinnic, Nelson Dewey, Willow River and Wyalusing State Parks	Merrick, Perrot and Wildcat Mountain State Parks Chippewa River, Great River, La Crosse River and Red Cedar State Trails Dunnville Wildlife Area		Coulee Experimental Forest Coon Creek Fishery Area La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Borst Valley, Cylon, Kickapoo, Muddy Creek, St Croix Islands, Ten Mile Creek, Tiffany and Whitman Dam Wildlife Area. Western Prairie Habitat Restoration
Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking	Great River State Trail	Chippewa River State Trail La Crosse River State Trail Red Cedar State Trail	Kinnickinnic, Nelson Dewey, Perrot, Willow River, Wildcat Mountain and Wyalusing State Parks Fenley and Hoffman Hills State Recreation Areas Douglas Hallock Demo Forest Coulee Experimental Forest Kickapoo Wildlife Area	Merrick State Park La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Coon Creek Fishery Area Borst Valley, Cylon, St Croix Islands, Ten Mile Creek, Tiffany and Whitman Dam Wildlife Areas Western Prairie Habitat Restoration

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Cross-country skiing	Kinnickinnic, Merrick Perrot, Wildcat Mountain, Willow River and Wyalusing State Parks Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area Red Cedar State Trail Chippewa River State Trail Coulee Experimental Forest Dunnville, Kickapoo and Muddy Creek Wildlife Areas	Great River State Trail La Crosse River State Trail La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Coon Creek Fishery Area Hogback Prairie Lower Chippewa River, Nine Mile Island and Rush Creek State Natural Areas Cylon, St Croix Islands, Ten Mile Creek, Tiffany and Van Loon Wildlife Areas Western Prairie Habitat Restoration	Nelson Dewey State Park Fenley State Recreation Area James J Rule Timber Demo Forest	Borst Valley Wildlife Area Whitman Dam Wildlife Area
Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking	All department properties are open to hiking, although most fishery, wildlife and natural areas do not have designated trails. Designated trails are found on state park, trail, forest, and flowage properties. Nearly all department properties have opportunities to add at least some designated hiking/ running/backpacking trails.			
Dog walking	Dog walking has similar characteristic as hiking. Dogs on department properties typically must be leashed unless the hunting season or dog training allows them to be loose. Nearly all department properties have opportunities to add trails designated for hiking. Properties closer to urban areas may provide better access to more people searching for dog walking opportunities.			
Snowshoeing	All department properties are open to snowshoeing, regardless if department properties have designated trails or not. Snowshoe use on groomed cross-country ski trails is usually not allowed.			

WATER RELATED RECREATION

In addition to trail-based activities, there is considerable demand for water related recreation in the Mississippi River Corridor Region, including fishing, visiting beaches, and canoeing or kayaking.

As the namesake for this region, the Mississippi River exerts a great influence on outdoor recreation. The river supports fishing for many types of gamefish species. The flowages and backwaters provide sufficient water for many other activities on the water.

While the Mississippi River is prominent on the landscape, the numerous tributaries and major waterways draining to the river also play a role in shaping water recreation. There are many existing boat launches as well as state ownership frontage to these waterways. Depending on the waterway, foot access for fishing may be sufficient. In other cases, primitive canoe access or developed boat landings may be what is needed for additional access.

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for water related recreation.

Recreation Activity	
Canoeing or kayaking	<p>Although not every property with open water has formal boat access sites (or access sites on all waterbodies) many of the lakes, rivers, and larger streams on department-managed lands have some opportunities to carry in a canoe or kayak. The following properties may have the potential to add more or better develop walk-in trails to access waterbodies with canoes or kayaks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dunnville Wildlife Area Fenley State Recreation Area Kickapoo Wildlife Area Lake Pepin Wildlife Area Merrick State Park Muddy Creek Wildlife Area Perrot State Park Van Loon Wildlife Area Wyalusing State Park
Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak	<p>The department currently maintains improved boat launches throughout the region. Many department properties connecting to these waterbodies either already have boat accesses or have no feasible way to create more. There are a few department properties that would be able to help address this recreation activity. Other public land management agencies may be able to provide additional access as well. The following properties may have potential to add more improved boat access sites (ramps for trailered boats):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lake Pepin Wildlife Area Muddy Creek Wildlife Area
Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading	<p>All department lands with streams or rivers are open to shore fishing and as such there are not opportunities to expand this opportunity at existing properties. There may be opportunities to expand shore fishing opportunities through the acquisition of key parcels or to create disabled accessible fishing areas on the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chippewa River State Trail Dunnville Wildlife Area Red Cedar State Trail Wyalusing State Park

Recreation Activity	
Fishing - river fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak	<p>The department currently maintains improved boat launches throughout the region. Department properties connecting to rivers either already have boat accesses or have no feasible way to create more. As such, there are few department properties that would be able to address this recreation activity. Other public land management agencies may be able to provide additional access. The following properties may have potential to add more improved boat access sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Dunnville Wildlife AreaMerrick State ParkPerrot State ParkWyalusing State Park
Visiting a beach, beach walking	<p>All department properties adjacent to public waters allow access to the water, however, there may not be a designated beach area. State parks typically have beaches to accommodate demand for swimming. The following department properties may be able to either add new opportunities or expand existing opportunities for visiting a beach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Dunnville Wildlife AreaLake Pepin Wildlife AreaNine Mile Island State Natural Area

OTHER FORMS OF RECREATION

There appears to be demand for many other types of outdoor recreation in the Mississippi River Corridor Region, including camping, picnicking, non-consumptive outdoor activities, and big game hunting.

Camping in general is becoming more popular in this region. Being closer to the Twin Cities Metro Area, the properties in the northern reaches of this region provide access to outdoor recreation with less time required to reach their destination. Places to go for the day and picnic, or simply going for a walk to experience wildlife are also appearing to increase in popularity in the region.

The bluffs and oak forests make this region very popular for deer hunting. Similarly, department properties here see a fair amount of hunting use. There are occasions where higher hunter numbers lessen the quality of the experience on public lands, especially during the deer gun season.

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for other forms of recreation.

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Camping – developed	Perrot, Merrick, Wildcat Mountain, Willow River and Wyalusing State Park		Kinnickinnic State Park Fenley State Recreation Area Chippewa River State Trail	Coulee Experimental Forest Coon Creek Fishery Area La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Borst Valley, Cylon, Dunnville, Kickapoo, Muddy Creek, St Croix Islands, Tiffany, Ten Mile Creek, Van Loon and Whitman Dam Wildlife Areas Western Prairie Habitat Restoration
Camping – primitive	Nelson Dewey State Park Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area Dunnville Wildlife Area Lake Pepin Wildlife Area	Wildcat Mountain State Park Tiffany Wildlife Area Van Loon Wildlife Area	Kinnickinnic, Perrot and Willow River State Parks Fenley State Recreation Area Chippewa River State Trail Great River State Trail Coulee Experimental Forest Muddy Creek Wildlife Area Kickapoo Wildlife Area	Wyalusing State Park Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area Coon Creek Fishery Area La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Borst Valley, Cylon, St Croix Islands, Ten Mile Creek and Whitman Dam Wildlife Areas Western Prairie Habitat Restoration

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Picnicking	Kinnickinnic, Merrick, Nelson Dewey, Perrot and Wyalusing State Parks La Crosse River State Trail Coulee Experimental Forest Dunnville Wildlife Area Muddy Creek Wildlife Area	Wildcat Mountain and Willow River State Parks Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area Red Cedar and Chippewa River State Trails Lower Chippewa River and Nine Mile Island State Natural Areas Coon Creek Fishery Area La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Cylon, St Croix Islands, Ten Mile Creek, Tiffany and Van Loon Wildlife Areas Western Prairie Habitat Restoration	Fenley State Recreation Area Great River State Trail Champion Valley Timber Demo Forest Kickapoo Wildlife Area	Borst Valley Wildlife Area Whitman Dam Wildlife Area
Big game hunting	Nearly all department properties are open to big game hunting for at least some part of the season. State parks and trails have special regulations pertaining to when and where hunting is allowed on the property. Hunter walking trials are sometimes desired to reach different parts of the property, so adding trails could provide better opportunity for some hunters. In some cases, properties may be able to add parking to improve access for hunters,			
Bird and wildlife watching	All department properties are open to bird and wildlife watching. Trails are sometimes desired but not necessary. In some cases, properties may be able to add viewing platforms that would provide better vantage points from which to view wildlife. Nearly all department properties have opportunities to add at least some designated hiking trails or viewing area that would aide this activity.			
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	All department properties are open to gathering edibles. Depending on what the edible sought, some properties may be preferred over others. Generally, no infrastructure is needed or desired for harvesting. Some products found on state properties are not allowed to be harvested without permission.			
Nature Photography	All department properties are open to nature photography. Depending upon if the target is a landscape view or a rare butterfly perched on a blade of grass, some properties may be preferred over others. Viewing platforms may assist some photography and provide better vantage points from which to capture images of wildlife.			
Participating in nature-based education programs	Most department properties are well positioned to be used for nature-based education programs. Some schools use these outdoor classrooms to give students “hands-on” experiences with the outdoors. Trails are sometimes desired but not necessary. In some cases, properties may be able to add viewing platforms that would provide better vantage points from which to view wildlife. The following department properties may have potential to add access to make nature-based education programs more successful: Kinnickinnic, Merrick, Perrot, Nelson Dewey, Wildcat Mountain, Willow River and Wyalusing State Parks Coulee Experimental Forest Coon Creek Fishery Area La Crosse Area Comprehensive Fishery Area Hoffman Hills and Fenley State Recreation Areas Red Cedar, La Crosse River and Chippewa River State Trails Muddy Creek and Dunnville Wildlife Areas			

SUMMARY OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER CORRIDOR REGION ROA

The topography and the riverine systems make the Mississippi River Corridor Region unique and draws a variety of outdoor recreationists, particularly for those in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area. The many rivers draining to the Mississippi draw trout fishermen from throughout the Midwest. These same rivers also attract a growing sector of paddlers to the area while the hills and valleys are attractive to mountain bikers. With the high-quality habitat for game and non-game species, hunting opportunity remains high, as does wildlife viewing. Hosting a diverse set of regional linear and loop trails, the region could expand existing and create new trail areas.

Although the region is rich in current opportunities, a variety of needs were expressed by residents. Topping the list of needs are: hiking, walking, and running trails, bicycling trails, cross-country skiing, hunting, fishing, camping and other non-consumptive activities.

The department believes there are opportunities to meet many of the desired recreational experiences on some of the properties it manages in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. In general, the department believes the following property groups are well-suited to provide the identified needs in the region:

STATE PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths. Properties in proximity to cities and villages likely would be most popular.
- Mountain biking trails that expand existing opportunities and create new destinations. These trails could provide single-track, constructed trails of varying difficulties (including potentially skills areas).
- Cross-country ski trails could be established and/or expanded on existing trails.
- Developed camping, including adding electrified sites to significant portions of campgrounds.
- Primitive camping to connect visitors to the myriad of lakes and rivers in the region.
- Picnic areas and wildlife viewing areas could be developed to meet the demand of day-users.
- Walk-in access to waterways for canoe/kayak users could be developed.

STATE TRAILS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths.
- Cross-country ski trails could be established and/or expanded on existing trails.
- Paved bicycle trails that expand the existing network linking cities and villages and campgrounds.
- Primitive camping to enable trail users to take multi-day trips.
- Picnic areas could be developed or expanded at trailhead areas.

STATE FORESTRY PROPERTIES

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths.
- Cross-country ski trails could be established.
- Mountain biking trails that expand existing opportunities and create new destinations. These trails could provide single-track, constructed trails of varying difficulties (including potentially skills areas).
- Picnic areas and wildlife viewing areas could be developed in areas not interrupting forestry operations.
- Primitive camping, allowing visitors to escape and surround themselves with the natural world.

STATE WILDLIFE AND FISHERY AREAS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths.
- Cross-country ski trails could be established and/or expanded on existing trails.
- Primitive camping, allowing visitors to escape and surround themselves with the natural world.
- Walk-in access to waterways for canoe/kayak users could be developed.

